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SPECIAL REPORT

Grappling With Drugs

MAY 1991

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WORLD DEVELOPMENT

SPECIAL REPORT

GRAPPLING WITH DRUGS

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Grappling

With Drugs

No task facing the United Nations is more daunting than its commitment to curb illicit drugs

By Lloyd Garrison

United Nations, New York—Over the years, in its struggle to improve conditions in the developing world, the UN system has eliminated small pox, controlled river blindness in much of West Africa, contributed to the Green Revolution in Asia and helped end wars and supervise free elections from Nicaragua to Namibia. But seldom have so few people with such limited means fought so powerful a force as those in UN agencies trying to stop the global spread of addictive drugs.

With only 19 headquarters staff in Vienna and an annual budget of US$70 million, the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC), faces multinational drug cartels which do over $1.5 trillion in business every year. Worldwide, revenue from the illicit drug trade surpasses oil exports and is second only to international arms sales. Margaret Anstee, who for the past four years co-ordinated all anti-drug efforts at the UN Office at Vienna, is afraid the drug war might be lost simply for lack of adequate funding. "We're being asked to do very much more with less," she says. In fact, government requests to the UN for help currently exceed UNFDAC's capacity to respond.

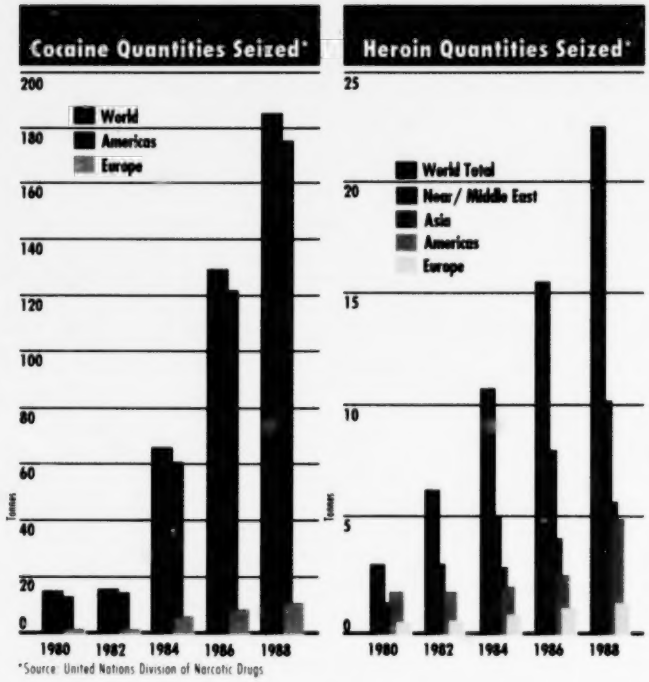
For a long time, few cared. In 1971, when UNFDAC was born, the drug problem was seen as confined to only a handful of affluent nations, mainly the US and a few Western European countries. The prevailing view in the developing world was that if self-indulgent Westerners, who included their former colonizers, wished to self-destruct on drugs provided by Cambodian or Pakistani peasants scrambling just to survive, so be it.

That has changed. The snake has turned to bite the hand that fed it. There are now more heroin addicts in Pakistan than in the United States. The shift took place in the early 1980s when the supply of opium from which heroin is derived began to outstrip the demand for it in the West. Anxious drug merchants began dumping the surplus in their own lands. While ending the heroin glut, the move created new pockets of high demand in Asia.

Today, Asian heroin competes with cocaine from Latin America and synthetic "designer" drugs from southern California. International drug cartels fight for a share of global markets. Their reach is almost limitless: Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, long considered immune to the drug threat, are the latest battlegrounds.

Ten years ago, Africa's addictions stemmed largely from the consumption of alcohol and locally grown cannabis. Today, over half the governments south of the Sahara have requested UNFDAC's help in reduc-

Brian Bailey/ Black Star



*Source: United Nations Division of Narcotic Drugs

ing a massive flow of heroin in transit from Asia to Europe and the US. As I. Rajeswary writes from Kenya in this special report on drugs, arresting heroin couriers is not easy. African governments fear that a spill-over of heroin into the local market will create a demand that will be even harder to contain.

A major myth about the drug trade is that at least the drug-producing nations derive big benefits as the principal suppliers of the poppy for heroin and the coca leaf for cocaine. According to Fedesarrollo, a Bogota-based economic research group, Colombia's development has been seriously inhibited by the dominance of the Medellin drug cartels. Over 80 per cent of the drug lords' profits are invested abroad. Little of what remains trickles down to the poor. Goods imported for sale in cartel-owned shopping malls are largely contraband and compete with Colombian-made products. More than 200 judges have been assassinated. Attempts to crush Medellin's drug armies and protect authorities cost the government $1 billion a year.

While the drawbacks from the commerce in drugs outweigh the advantages, the trade does confer some peripheral benefits. Countries with a heavy foreign debt burden gain whenever drug barons launder their hard currency earnings in local banks. Peasants almost always get more money for illicit crops than for traditional ones. This makes UN crop substitution campaigns hard to sell, as documented in reports by Andrew Boner from Pakistan and Emma Robson from Bolivia.

Both writers examine new UN strategies in crop substitution which provide farmers with high yield seeds for alternative crops—as well as new roads, schools, clean water and sanitation. UNFDAC calls it "integrated rural development." The approach, combined with rigorous interdiction, is clearly making headway among farmers who had rejected earlier crop substitution drives.

As a measure of the rising concern over the spread of narcotics, many developing country governments have resorted to harsh measures to stop addiction from sapping the promise of their youth—the dealers' prime targets. An Egyptian television campaign against drug abuse has gone into the Cairo morgue to show the bodies of young people who died from overdoses. China, a new transit centre for drugs being smuggled out of Southeast Asia, has doubled heroin seizures in the past year. In the first three months after a tough new anti-drug law took effect, Iran executed no less than 356 smugglers. The death penalty for dealing is also in force in Malaysia, Mauritius and Singapore.

Last January, in a bid to make all UN anti-drug efforts more efficient and avoid duplication, the Secretary-General appointed Giorgio Giacomelli, a veteran Italian diplomat, to head up a new UN International Drug Control Programme. The new Vienna-based agency now embraces UNFDAC and two other UN units, the Division of Narcotic Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board.

Many UN specialized agencies, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), play important supporting roles. Such agencies have mounted projects tackling the impact of drugs on tourism, health, industry, agriculture, shipping and air transport, to name a few.

In the interest of cutting its overhead to the bone, UNFDAC has turned to UNDP's Office for Project Services to monitor expenses, hire consultants, and purchase equipment. Last year, more than one-third of UNFDAC's budget was funnelled through UNDP to over 40 projects. In the many countries where

Addicts imprisoned in Peshawar, Pakistan.

UNFDAC has no field offices, UNDP's resident representatives act on the fund's behalf.

While halting the spread of illicit drugs appears to be an impossible assignment, UNFDAC and the UN specialized agencies have made some important strides. In the 1970s, UNFDAC aided the Turkish government in a successful drive to rid the country of poppy cultivation. The UN has spearheaded a 1988 Convention on drugs which took affect last August when Spain became the twentieth nation to adopt it. The Convention, which includes the US and most European nations as backers, makes it possible for the first time to trace and seize the assets of international drug dealers by eliminating bank secrecy in drug investigations.

On the 15th floor of the UN Office at Vienna is an elaborate laboratory which tests new drugs and has trained over 315 chemists from 92 developing countries. Once the trainees return home and set up their own labs, their testing skills and expert testimony are often critical in winning convictions in court against suspected dealers.

Other landmarks include the launching of drug enforcement training programmes in 26 African countries. Since UNFDAC began its support for anti-drug interdiction in Africa in the mid-1980s, newly trained anti-narcotics squads have uncovered huge caches of illicit drugs. The first time a newly trained unit in Gabon screened arriving passengers at the airport in Libreville, it uncovered 17 kilos of heroin.

Nowhere has progress been more evident than in Mauritius, where Ms. Robson documents a rare success story in which UNFDAC joined with a determined government to free the island nation of an epidemic of "brown sugar," a potent and smokable derivative of heroin imported from India.

However, global initiatives are clearly necessary to even begin to put a dent in drug abuse. Says Ms. Anstee: "We have repeatedly seen that no one country, not even a few countries together, can deal effectively with the menace of the drug cartels." But as Dilshad Najamuddin, the former chairman of Pakistan's Narcotics Control Board has pointed out, donor support for multilateral anti-drug efforts is still lagging, with the notable exception of Italy, which provides UNFDAC with nearly half of its annual funding. "The UN budget for drug control activities," laments Mr. Najamuddin, "is still equivalent to the value of a suitcase of heroin at Heathrow airport." ■

Integrated rural development takes hold in Pakistan

Pursuing the Elusive Poppy

By Andrew Boner

Dir, Pakistan—Beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder. When in early spring, deep crimson and mauve flowers speckle the terraced hillsides of northwest Pakistan, most beholders would agree they are beautiful enough. But to some the colours comprise nothing more than a metaphorical bruise on a country that's being knocked about by a bully. They are the colours of blossoming opium poppy, and the bully is drugs.

Only 10 years ago, heroin addiction was virtually unknown in Pakistan. Today, the number of addicts in the country exceeds one million. Pakistan's annual consumption of opium has risen from six tonnes in 1979 to 380 tonnes today, a habit that costs addicts at least US$1.1 billion a year.

Much of this demand is met by farmers growing opium poppy here in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The narrow valleys and steep slopes of the province offer only limited access to the poppy-growing areas and make a concerted poppy eradication effort difficult at best. Moreover, the farmers here are suspicious of any

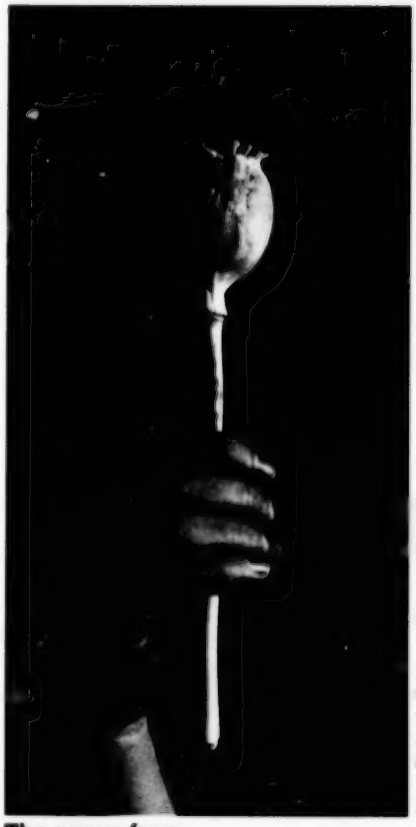


Photo: Richard Sypher

The poppy from which opium is derived.

Robert Nickelsberg / Gamma-Liaison

Most of Pakistan's one million addicts use heroin.

The law often depends on who is holding a Kalashnikov rifle.

Andrew Boner / UNDP

attempt to discourage the production of opium gum which is conveniently low in weight and bulk, but high in cash value. Arguing with a poppy-grower can also mean arguing with his Kalashnikov automatic rifle, a hand-me-down from the days of the Soviet occupation of neighbouring Afghanistan, and a reminder that the law in this province often depends on whose finger is on the trigger.

Such are the realities confronting Pakistan in its escalating war against drugs. While national statistics reveal an increasing incidence of drug abuse among Pakistani teenagers, an increase in the number of Pakistani nationals arrested on drug-related charges in the United States has lent a loud foreign accent to the voices pestering the government for action. But what can be done in such an unreceptive environment?

One answer can be found among the fields of wheat and onions that have turned the fields around Buner, a sub-division of the Swat district, into a golden-green oasis amidst the blood red poppies that colour much of the rest of the NWFP. Buner, which covers only two per cent of the district, is the site of a pilot project executed by the Office for Project Services of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A total of $9 million has been invested in the project, of which more than $7.5 million was contributed by the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC).

When the project was launched in 1976, sales of raw opium gum accounted for more than half of the average family's annual income of $60 in Buner. Meanwhile, food production was insufficient to sustain the 228,000 residents of the area. Despite an increase in the population to 317,000, Buner today is poppy-free, a net exporter of cereal crops, and per capita income has more than doubled to $160 a year.

The elimination of poppy-farming in the region is largely thanks to an experiment in eradication that goes beyond traditional crop substitution methods. This master plan approach, as it was deemed by UNFDAC in 1983, requires that a more comprehensive assessment of a country's drug problems and development needs be used in the design of eradication projects. "Nowadays it's unhelpful to talk about simple alternatives to poppy," says Don McIntosh, the UNFDAC field adviser based in Islamabad. "There's such a high margin between what the farmer

Andrew Bonar - UNDP

A newly planted pine "forest" on the hillsides of Dir.

Diane Richard - Sygma

This roadside dealer's attaché case holds eight kilos of opium.

gets and what the product is ultimately worth on the streets of Europe and North America that the price given to the farmer has lots of room to expand.

Of the crops that can be grown commercially in place of the poppy—onions, wheat, and barley—none can yield a consistently higher cash value per acre. Even in 1989, when poppy prices were depressed, a hectare of poppy promised a return of roughly $1,000, ten times that of its most profitable alternative. And most alternate crops introduce significant problems of processing, marketing and transportation. Only coffee in Thailand has proven to be a feasible substitute, and then only with the benefit of sustained enforcement.

Pakistan's Special Development and Enforcement Plan (SDEP) for the opium-growing areas is an integrated rural development strategy. It aims at restructuring the entire economies of these areas to provide people with an acceptable living standard without resorting to poppy cultivation.

Crop substitution is but one element of this strategy. Under the new plan, which is currently being applied on a much larger scale here in the Dir district, paved roads, electrification and improved drinking water systems are being built to provide the basic underpinnings for economic growth. Irrigation, land-levelling, soil conservation and forestation are also included in the scheme. High-yielding varieties of substitute crops like wheat and barley are provided to farmers at subsidized rates, as are fruit trees, bee hives, vegetable seed and fertilizer. Farmers are trained in improved methods of cultivation.

Also required for any project designed under SDEP is a schedule for enforcement tied to the pace of the development. "The idea is that development should precede or at least go hand-in-hand with enforcement," says Mr. McIntosh. "Of course, left to themselves, the farmers would never give up poppy because it's such an attractive cash crop. The development provides the sweetener to make the enforcement more palatable." All those new and improved roads benefit not only the farmer, they also help enforcement officers gain speedier access to previously remote areas.

Enforcement follows a well-tested formula. In September of each year, the government convenes a meeting to decide where next to ban cultivation. Once such areas have been designated, political agents hold meetings with tribal elders and local villagers. During these meetings, farmers are told of the enforcement schedule and of the alternatives that are available to them. The exercise is repeated in November. Despite these warnings, it is not unusual that by January the following year some farmers have planted poppy, and efforts are made with these farmers to find a substitute crop before the growing season is lost. Failing this, the crop is destroyed.

The Dir project has posed a dilemma for aid officials. The $14.6 million that UNFDAC has allocated is supposed to be spent on converting opium-growers to non-growers. But, in fact, some of the money has gone to develop areas where farmers have refrained from growing poppy since the ban was officially imposed in 1979.

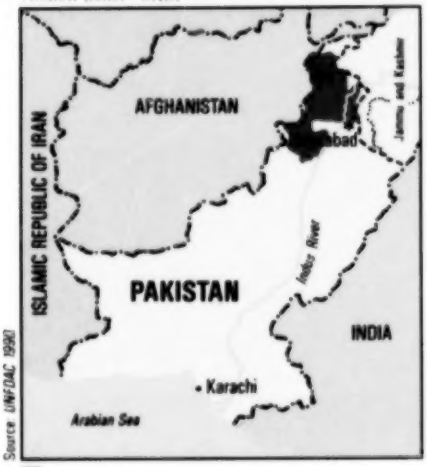
"The logic behind that is simple," explains Iqbal Kidwai, the deputy project director in Dir. "If you ignore the farmers who respected the ban it looks like you're rewarding the bad guys."

Even so, Hans von Sponeck, the resident representative of UNDP in Pakistan, would like to get another donor or perhaps even the government to finance development schemes in the poppy-free zones so the UNFDAC funds can be spent solely on eradication efforts.

For example, UNDP and UNFDAC involvement in the Buner scheme ended in 1987. However, development assistance to the region continues to be provided by the European Community and is contingent upon the continued absence of poppy cultivation. Five other poppy eradication projects in the NWFP are being supported by USAID and the United States.

Andrew Boner / UNDP

A eucalyptus nursery for the afforestation programme.



Source: UNFDAC 1990

Poppy Growing Areas

Bureau of International Narcotic Matters. The five projects have a total budget of $102 million and cover 7,570 square kilometres. In comparison to these projects, UNFDAC's current undertaking in Dir is ambitious to say the least.

The Dir district includes an area of almost 5,300 square kilometres to be covered with a budget of only $16.3 million, of which roughly $1.7 million is provided by the government.

There are three main poppy growing areas in Dir. "Farmers in the southwest of the district agreed to refrain from poppy cultivation if we put in a road, and they've apparently kept to that," says Mr. McIntosh. "We've also extended the ban to Chakdara in the south, but poppy cultivation continues throughout four main valleys in the eastern part of the district."

Many of Dir's poppy farmers are not yet fully aware of how they can benefit under the programme. Similarly, the district's size and the diversity of the development schemes has left some people wondering just how integrated the integrated rural development strategy is. "We're in the process of organizing village committees that can be more effective in getting the word out to farmers," says Mr. Kidwai.

Extension efforts to date have not been fruitless. "When we first arrived in the area, there was a lot of resistance to development assistance, particularly when we told them they had to give up the poppy," says Mr. Kidwai. "Now our office receives more applications for help than we can service."

Such an observation can be interpreted two ways. Advocates of this kind of approach hear a story of willing farmers all eagerly looking for alternatives to poppy cultivation. Critics hear a story of more poppy farmers than there are government agents to convert them.

And the dichotomy goes beyond that. "If you look at how these projects affect a narrow geographical area, like Buner, you see an outstandingly successful project," says Mr. McIntosh. "But if you look at Pakistan over all, that project hasn't done anything to reduce the supply of heroin because cultivation has simply shifted to the more difficult areas to administer."

This begs the broader question: even if all poppy cultivation were eradicated in Pakistan, would the nation's one million heroin users suddenly lose the habit? "Obviously you'd put an end to the production of heroin in Pakistan," says Mr. McIntosh. "The laboratories would not exist if there were nothing for them to produce."

However, it seems unlikely that this would have any significant effect on the flow of drugs among Pakistan's addicts. In the Golden Triangle, where other eradication projects have succeeded in eliminating most of Thailand's opium production, cultivation has simply shifted across the border into Myanmar and Laos where it becomes a more difficult problem to tackle.

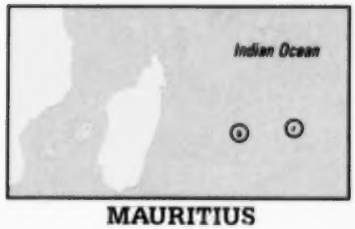
Similarly, here on the north-west frontier, poppy cultivation is expanding increasingly into Afghanistan where the twelve-year-old civil war, and the lingering abundance of unmarked Soviet minefields, make it impossible to implement an effective drug control programme. As this move takes place, so Pakistan's drug control effort is expanding to include effective border control.

"You have to ask yourself," says Mr. McIntosh, "is all this justification for not doing anything? Or should you say you've got to do something and then take it one step at a time?"

"We've cleaned up Buner, and we're taking on Dir," he adds. "Who knows what the next step will be?" ■

Cracking down on dealers, reaching out with therapy

Mauritius: A Rare Success Story in Drugs Control



MAURITIUS

By Emma Robson

Port Louis, Mauritius—On a sunny afternoon in Plaine Verte, a residential district of the Mauritian capital, men play dominoes in the shaded park. A taxi driver, his car windows rolled down and the engine turned off, nibbles lazily on a *bhaji*, a deep-fried onion snack. This picture of calm contrasts starkly with the stormy events of five years ago, when Plaine Verte teemed with drug dealers and the government's countermeasures were only a plan.

Since then, Mauritius has rounded up all major traffickers and reduced imports of opium and "brown sugar"—a highly addictive form of smokable heroin—to a trickle. By introducing harsh measures against offenders and aggressively enforcing them, Mauritius' war on drugs has created a sense of fear, if not respect, for authority. This explains why, even if drugs were for sale in Plaine Verte, locals would be unlikely to help a stranger find them. "I got 15 days in jail just for bringing people to a selling point," says the taxi driver, who declined to give his name. "No one wants anything to do with drugs now. It's all over."

He may be right. Police and customs seizures of heroin have fallen from more than 11 kilogrammes in 1986 to less than 250 grammes in 1989 and 1990.

Once the government realized the extent of the country's addiction, it moved quickly. A law passed in September 1986 introduced the death penalty for major drug traffickers. Today, five drug dealers are on death row and dozens of others face sentences of up to 20 years. While those arrested for possession of drugs can serve up to eight years, judges are increasingly committing offenders to rehabilitation centres, space permitting. Drug therapy is also being introduced into prisons.

Such stiff penalties have acted as a powerful deterrent. Former opium addict Idris Joomun, a resident of Plaine Verte, recently completed a two-year sentence for possession of opium. "I only had a few drops, but they'd arrested me before," says the 64-year-old seller of lottery tickets. Looking back,

Chief Inspector Franco John shows off samples of seized heroin.

Photos by Emma Robson, UNDP

Interdiction is aided by trained sniffer dogs.

Anti-drug posters displayed in schools and public places.

Mr. Joomun feels the law was harsh on him. In prison, he got no help in overcoming his addiction. "It was straight cold turkey, which was hard," he says. "But they had to be hard. Mauritius had a big problem."

Officials trace the country's drug problem to attempts to use the island as a transit point for Asian heroin bound for Europe. Many of the drugs entering the country came from Bombay, and soon found a ready market in Mauritius. "In late 1985 and early 1986, the situation was at its worst," says Assistant Police Commissioner Cyril Morvan, who heads the five-year-old national anti-drugs and smuggling unit. "People lined up openly to buy drugs, and traffickers thought they were all-powerful."

One out of every 200 citizens was estimated to be a heroin addict, a rate more than double that of the US national average. As addiction grew, so did crime. For a time, some members of government were involved. In late 1985, four members of parliament were arrested by Dutch police on charges of smuggling 20 kilos of heroin into Amsterdam airport. The arrests eventually led to the resignation of four government ministers and prompted Prime Minister Aneerood Jugnauth to seek international assistance through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Port Louis.

UNDP contacted the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC), which dispatched a specialist to Mauritius to make a quick assessment of the country's problem. On arriving at the airport in September 1986, UNFDAC programme officer Gale Day was chauffeured straight to the office of the prime minister. "There was a remarkable political commitment," recalls Mr. Day, who now heads UNFDAC's Africa programme at the organization's headquarters in Vienna. "The government had drafted a plan and had the money ready. All they needed was a little expertise and, above all, encouragement."

To help detect smuggled drugs, UNFDAC gave the police four sniffer dogs and training for their handlers. It also trained the head of the central police laboratory in drug analysis and provided the anti-drugs and smuggling unit with transport and communications equipment. In addition, UNFDAC advised on seizure of assets and trained two senior customs officials in how to go about finding drugs.

When Mr. Day arrived, the 150-person anti-drugs squad was already in action and new anti-drugs legislation had breezed through parliament. The entire police force was being retrained in a bid to increase efficiency and motivation. Security measures were tightened at all points of entry. Large notices were posted at the airport warning potential drug smugglers of the new death penalty. The results were immediate: drug-related arrests and seizures of heroin soared. Reflecting growing scarcity, the street price of a dose of heroin rose from 30 rupees (US$2.10) in 1986 to 300 rupees ($21) in 1990, putting it out of reach of many Mauritians.

No estimates are available on the island's current rate of heroin addiction, but drug enforcement officials and rehabilitation workers insist that it is low. "I would say our problem is very light now compared with countries in Europe and Africa," says Mr. Morvan.

One important reason why the country was able to come to grips quickly with the problem is its small size. Mauritius is slightly larger than London and its suburbs, which makes it relatively easy to police. Mr. Morvan says other factors that helped were political will, discipline and motivation. "We now reward good police work," says Mr. Morvan. "Two of my team have already been promoted for arresting big traffickers."

Ironically, while Mauritius may have rid itself of drug imports, street demand for alternative psychotic substances has fanned an increase in domestically-grown *gandia*, a type of cannabis. Helicopter surveys show new *gandia* plants emerging virtually on a weekly basis. "We routinely burn these plants," says Mr. Morvan. "But we have to be constantly on the alert."

Deprived of their traditional fixes, individuals are also turning to alcohol and injecting what is locally known as "salad"—a mixture of pain killers or sedatives cut with water or vinegar. Consumption of prescription drugs and alcohol is difficult to control since they are not illegal substances. Rum has always been abundant in Mauritius, one of the world's major producers, and at less than $2 a litre, it is cheap.

To combat these new trends in substance abuse, Mauritius has launched several public information campaigns. In addition, it is gradually expanding a network of non-governmental rehabilitation centres which now provide judges with an alternative to sending addicts to the island's prisons, where half of all inmates are serving drug-related sentences.

Supporting the education programmes and rehabilitation network is the Trust Fund for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts, an um-

brella organization of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) set up with a grant from the government in 1986. In a bid to offer addicts a better chance of overcoming their problem, Trust Fund officials asked UNFDAC to help it set up a pilot rehabilitation centre to serve as a model for other units in Mauritius.

The new centre is funded by a $500,000 grant from the Centre of Italian Solidarity (CEIS), a Rome-based NGO specializing in drug-related development. The centre's main objective is to reinforce the individual's sense of personal worth through positive interaction with others. Addicts work closely together on everyday domestic tasks and take part in group therapy sessions and yoga. The approach attaches high importance to the role families can play in the recovery process. Close family members are invited to take part in the two to three-month non-residential induction phase in order to better respond to the addict's experience.

Sister Maude, the Centre's director, who was trained along with 10 other Mauritians in Italy, believes that the CEIS method offers Mauritius its best chance of becoming a drug-free society. "Mauritius has several rehabilitation centres but they all have too clinical an approach to drug treatment, which is not very successful," she says. The CEIS rehabilitation centre in Rome claims to have an 80 per cent success rate.

Lunch time at a new drug rehabilitation centre in Rose Hill.

Photos by Emma Robert, UNDP

Sister Maude, director of the Rose Hill centre.

While the government plans to expand the number of centres offering the CEIS method, Vijay Lutchmun, executive director of the Trust Fund, hopes that his organization's consciousness-raising activities in schools and in the workplace will reduce the need for Mauritians to attend such institutions.

To date the campaigns appear to have had little influence on Plaine Verte, where Mr. Joomun says he has taken up drinking as an alternative to drugs. "I like whisky, rum and wine, but I'm no alcoholic," he says.

"They say that once you're an addict, you're always an addict," says Mr. Lutchmun. "So our aim is to reach out to all corners of society—to sports clubs, youth clubs, women's clubs—to prevent addiction before it occurs." ■

Anti-narcotics police nab drug couriers using Nairobi as a transit point

Kenya Declares War on Drugs

By I. Rajeswary

KENYA

Scene I: *Kenya Airways Flight 412 from Bombay taxis up to the terminal of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport outside Nairobi at 8.30 a.m. Police inspector Michael Kibett and his men, all in plain clothes, mix with arriving passengers, on the look-out for suspected drug couriers. Mr. Kibett's first suspect is a young Indian in his twenties who wears a navy blue pinstripe suit, white shirt, red striped tie and scuffed black leather shoes. He keeps fingering his tie as he walks down the stairs to the baggage carousel. He pushes his luggage cart to the customs check-point and adjusts his tie again.*

While nattily dressed, his scuffed shoes seem out of place and his nervousness with his tie tells Mr. Kibett that he is uncomfortable wearing one. Mr. Kibett whispers to the customs officer. Not only does the officer find a false bottom in the Indian's suitcase, but three plastic bags of white powder as well. Mr. Kibett asks the man to follow him to the police interrogation room.

Scene II: *It is 8 p.m. in the dimly-lit vacant lot beside the low-cost housing project for employees of Jomo Kenyatta National Hospital. In the fetid rain-soaked air, "Uncle," as he is known to local drug addicts, tells a buyer known only as Philip that he does not have 1,000 Mandrax pills because his supplier failed to deliver. "Uncle" promises to produce the pills—powerful amphetamines—the next day. He persuades Philip to buy valium instead. "Uncle" is 18 years old but looks much older. His right eye is partially closed and his speech is slurred. A 10-year-old boy hovers behind him, sniffing a rag which smells of petrol. Unknown to "Uncle," Philip is an informer laying the groundwork for a sting operation.*

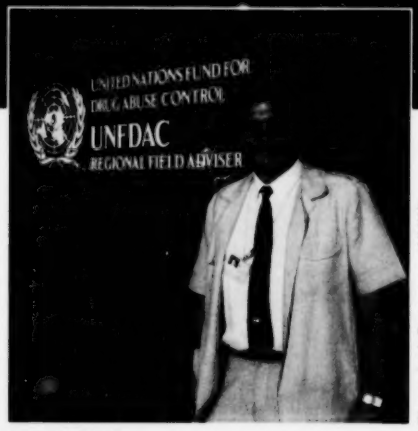
Scene III: *A British Airways flight from London arrives at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Mr. Kibett singles out a European man in his mid-thirties. He is wearing blue jeans, a T-shirt and is carrying a haversack. He paces the floor and smokes furiously. He fits the profile of a drug user. But when the luggage comes through, the man grabs his suitcase and zips through customs. With his tourist visa, he is considered a "Class A" passenger. His bags are not searched.*

Nairobi has become a major transit stop for Asian drug traffickers.

Anti-narcotics police walk a thin line in pursuing their mission. "We cannot afford to have tourists complaining that they are being harassed at our airports," says Mr. Kibett, who heads the anti-narcotics team at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Tourism became Kenya's principal source of foreign exchange in 1987 after coffee, petroleum products and tea, netting over US$250 million annually.

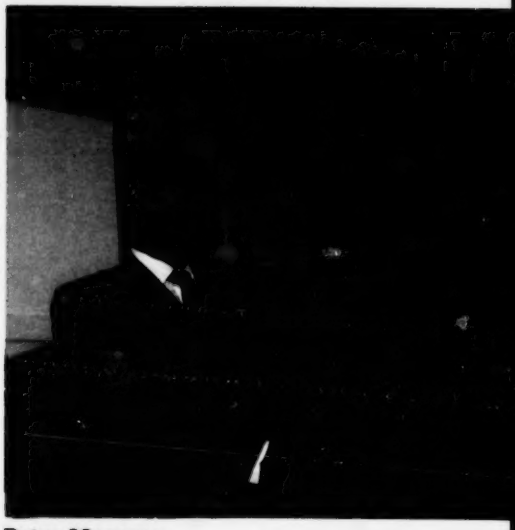
Still, Inspector Kibett and his men have their hands full. Over the last six years, the Kenyan capital of Nairobi has become a major transit point for narcotics originating from Asia and destined for Europe and North America. Yet for every drug courier who is nabbed, says Anti-narcotics police chief Peter Masemo Kimanthi, at least 10 more slip through the net.

As is frequently the case with the transit drug trade, a spill-over effect has



Matti Bäckman, UNFDAC's Kenya-based regional field adviser.

Photos by I. Rajeswary, UNDP



Peter Masemo Kimanthi, Chief of Kenya's anti-narcotics police.

resulted in drug addiction among some Kenyans. In the absence of a national survey, no one knows how many addicts there are. Mr. Kimanthi says that since the Anti-Narcotics Unit came into force, the police have detected an increase in heroin use. So far, drug use is largely confined to Nairobi and the port of Mombasa. The government is determined to prevent it from spreading to the rural areas, where most Kenyans live.

Recognizing the seriousness of the threat, the government created the special Anti-Narcotics Unit within the police Criminal Investigation Division in 1984. Its initial goal was eradicating the production of cannabis, which flourishes in Kenya, and curbing foreign trafficking in hard drugs.

In 1988, with smuggling on the rise, the government turned to the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) for specialized training in investigative procedures. Senior officers passed on the latest techniques to their juniors.

UNFDAC also provided two patrol boats for surveillance of Kenya's 600-kilometre coastline. "Our role," says Matti Backman, UNFDAC's regional field adviser in Nairobi, "is to ensure that Kenya has both the resources and the expertise to fight the drug problem." Mr. Backman, an ex-police officer from Finland, also works on anti-drug initiatives with the governments of Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Starting in 1985, says Mr. Backman, methaqualone, an amphetamine known on the street as *Mandrax* or *speed*, began making its way by air from India and Pakistan to East Africa. It was bound for South African and European markets. Heroin from Thailand, India and Pakistan that is shipped via East Africa is also headed for Europe and North America. "Traffickers always try to find the weakest control points," says Mr. Backman, "so that their consignments cannot be detected."

Former Addict Turned Pastor Helps Other Addicts Kick the Habit

Nairobi, Kenya—Tony Kamande was eight when he smoked his first cigarette. He ran away from home at 12 and ended up at a school for delinquents in Nairobi. By then he was already smoking cannabis and sniffing petrol. He somehow managed to complete his secondary education.

While still a student, he formed a gang called the *42 Boys Club*. "We smoked cigarettes, took drugs, stole, robbed, broke into houses and did some things which I do not wish to mention," he recalls.

The *42 Boys Club* was befriended by a pastor who had a profound effect on Mr. Kamande's future. He persuaded young Mr. Kamande and some of his friends to give up drugs. "I decided after that to dedicate my life to helping young people kick the habit," says Mr. Kamande, who is now 33 and a pastor and counsellor at the Canaan Land Rehabilitation Centre run by the Redeemed Gospel Church. The church also feeds homeless youngsters and pays school fees for 1,700 children every year, actions that are partially funded by World Vision International, a US non-governmental organization (NGO).

Drug rehabilitation in Kenya is almost entirely the work of NGOs, religious institutions and individual donors. Recently, two affluent Kenyan businessmen walked into the Nairobi office of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) and asked for advice on how they could contribute to rehabilitation efforts.

Mr. Kamande's Canaan Land Rehabilitation Centre covers three hec-

Tony Kamande (*fourth from left*) counsels ex-addicts at the church centre.

Recovering addicts learn carpentry at a centre run by the Redeemed Gospel Church.

tares in the heart of the Mathare Valley slums, a 20-minute drive from downtown Nairobi. Mathare's 200,000 inhabitants live in shelters made from discarded cardboard boxes and pieces of rusty metal. Open sewers frequently overflow in the rainy season and garbage is strewn everywhere. Drug addiction, alcoholism and prostitution are rampant.

Mr. Kamande says the Centre was deliberately built in the slums in order to reach the drug addicts he treats. He counsels them twice a week, individually and in groups. Their ages range from eight to 25. "Often," he says, "they yell at me, saying that I do not understand what they are going through. When I tell them I have been in their shoes, many break down and cry and promise to change."

Some recovering youths are learning carpentry and welding at vocational schools run by the church. "When we can raise the money, we will convert the Centre into a boarding facility and keep the young off the streets, where temptation is everywhere," says Mr. Kamande.

Until then, rehabilitation remains an uphill battle. "The boys who play soccer and volleyball here at the Centre feel good about themselves," says Mr. Kamande. "But they go back to the squalor every day and it takes great strength to rise above it."—**I.R.**

Nairobi is no longer a weak link in the chain. In October last year, Kenyan airport police seized four kilogrammes of heroin valued at $1.3 million. In June, the same authorities impounded heroin with a street value of $2 million—the largest seizure since the Anti-Narcotics Unit was formed.

According to Mr. Kimanthi, men and women couriers frequently swallow drug-filled condoms or insert them into their private parts. Two of five Nigerians arrested last October had swallowed 106 pellets of heroin weighing 2.8 kilogrammes, with each pellet wrapped in cellophane tape. Police say most of the couriers arrested in Nairobi are West Africans, along with some Indian nationals.

The drug problem in Kenya is complicated by the availability of psychotropic substances such as valium, barbiturates and cough syrup stolen from government hospitals or bought under the counter from pharmacies or clinics. Thus, pushers like "Uncle" can promise delivery of 1,000 Mandrax pills—a prescription drug—within 24 hours.

In Kenya, the Health Ministry is responsible for the control of psychotropic substances. A survey is underway to assess the incidence of drug abuse in schools. With UNFDAC support, the Ministry is also compiling books, posters and videos on drug abuse to be introduced soon in rural and urban primary schools. "The world is now a global village," says Dr. Kijana Baya, co-ordinator of the education programme. "We do not want to wait for our children to become addicts and then try to cure them. We want to stop it now."

UNFDAC is also helping to fund a government information campaign to educate the public at large about the dangers of drugs, urging them to report corrupt chemists and wholesalers selling psychotropic substances. "Once people start tipping off the authorities," says Dr. Baya, "the culprits will become frightened and the supply of drugs in the market should dwindle."

To better co-ordinate the fight against both dealing and substance abuse, a high-level national workshop involving policy-makers, education and health officials, police and customs units will be held in Nairobi in June. Legislation is awaiting parliamentary approval recommending life sentences for convicted drug traffickers. The government, through its courts, is also planning to seize the assets of convicted dealers.

Mr. Kimanthi is confident that the nation's drug problem can be contained. But a recent newspaper article lying on his desk has him worried; it reports that Kenya Airways is due to fly to Brazil shortly. "It is good for the airline," he says, "but it will open up new routes for cocaine traffickers from Latin America." Slapping his hand with his steel letter opener, Mr. Kimanthi says: "We will simply have to be more vigilant."

Meanwhile, the Anti-Narcotics Unit's undercover work has paid off with the recent arrest of "Uncle," who led police to a major supplier of amphetamines. The case, now closed, was but one of 3,085 drug arrests in 1990—more than double the 1,308 arrests the year before. ■

Balancing drug interdiction with development in Bolivia

Replacing the Hen that Lays Golden Eggs

By Emma Robson

Eterazama, Bolivia—On a quiet afternoon in this small village in the department of Cochabamba, traders unload boxes of fruit and farmers sip sodas in the shade of shop canopies. When a government car appears, two T-shirted youths whisper urgently into walky-talkies, warning dealers in the villages beyond of impending danger. The government moves warily in this region, known as the "red zone," where thousands of packets of semi-refined cocaine change hands, to be flown from hidden jungle airstrips to overseas destinations.

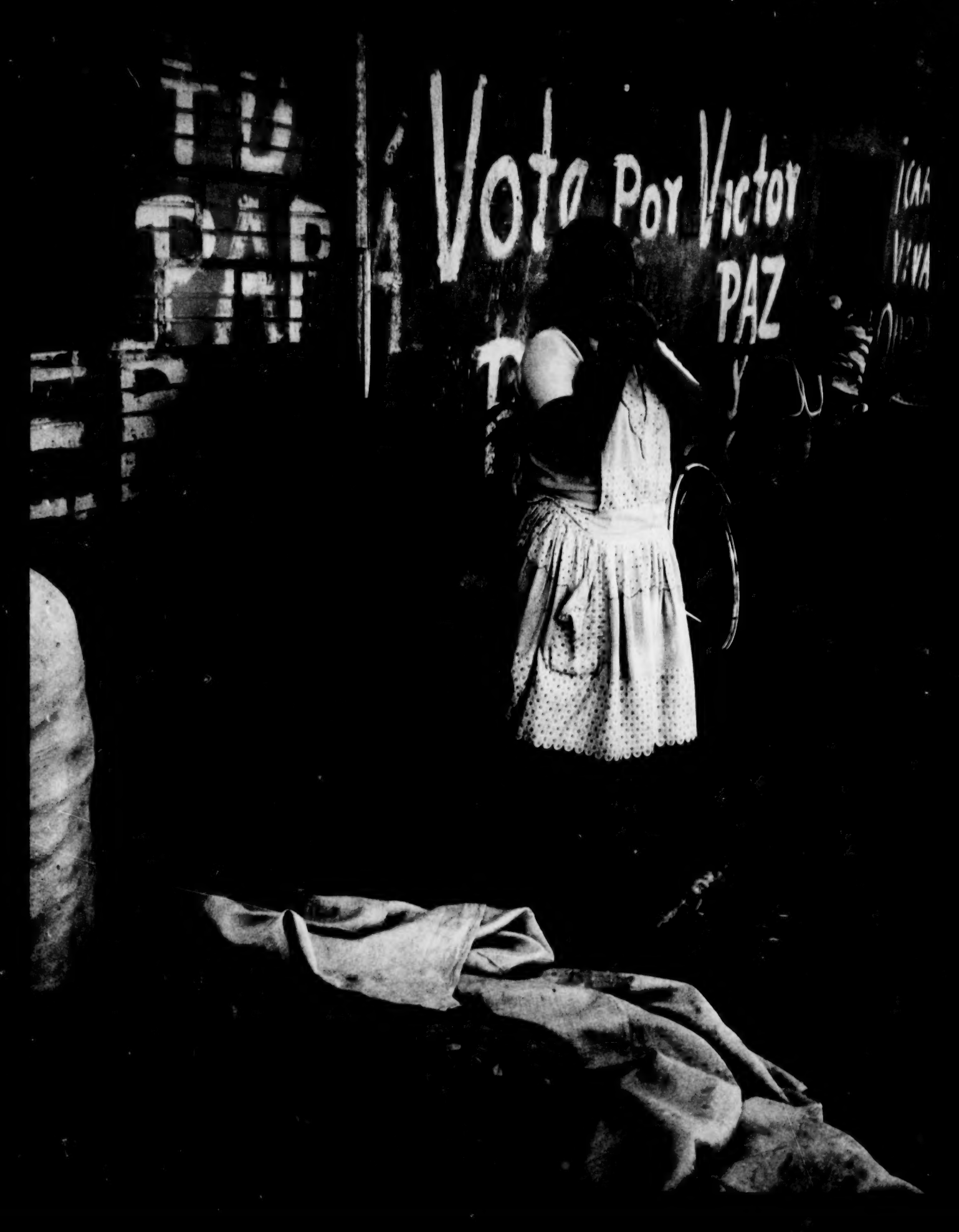
The "red zone" is out of bounds to development. How long it remains in the hands of the dealers will depend on the success of current government efforts to convince farmers that it is offering peace and the means to a better life. So far, the patrol cars and helicopters of the drug interdiction forces are the only government presence the region's 19,000 coca farmers know.

Now, after years of depending on interdiction alone, Bolivia is using a new weapon in its battle to stem cocaine production and exports. It is called "alternative development" and it reflects an awareness that force alone will not stop peasants from growing coca, the primary source of cocaine.

In fact, coca accounts for up to 90 per cent of the income of Bolivia's 60,000 coca farmers. "Neither interdiction nor development will succeed alone," says Oswaldo Antezana, the sub-secretary in charge of the government's alternative development programme. "We have to battle on both fronts."

Bolivia's experiment with alternative development dates back to 1985, when the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) began assisting farmers in northwestern Bolivia in diversifying away from coca production. Those efforts were greatly assisted by legislation passed in mid-1988, which ruled that four-fifths of the nearly 60,000 hectares of coca produced in Bolivia are illegal. Bolivia also began offering coca farmers US$2,000 for each hectare they eradicate, and twice that amount in credit to plant new crops and buy bees or livestock. Other benefits offered by

Emma Robson, UNDP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PAZ

Farmers in the Chapare region are learning to market cassava for animal feed.

The government is distributing fish to farmers forsaking coca-growing.

the programme include agricultural training, schools, hospitals, safe drinking water, and local roads to get produce to market.

In Cochabamba and Yungas, the country's two main coca-producing regions, the approach is already yielding some encouraging results. Since the 1988 legislation, farmers have voluntarily uprooted 11,000 hectares. The government has set itself the target of each year eliminating 6,000 hectares of the remaining 52,000 hectares of coca. The leaf that is grown in legal areas is used in its natural state, mainly for chewing and making tea.

Achieving that aim will require a good deal of aid. Giovanni Quaglia, field adviser for UNFDAC in Bolivia, estimates that the country will need an annual $100 million for eight years to eliminate illegal coca entirely. Current investments are running $70 million short of that amount. UNFDAC is providing $10 million a year, most of which comes from Italy. The US government is contributing an additional $20 million annually.

But the growing and selling of coca remains deeply embedded in the country's economy. In the early 1980s, coca was the only commodity that could keep pace with spiralling inflation. In less than 10 years, production of the leaf tripled, making Bolivia the world's second largest supplier.

The plant offered a quick escape from poverty. "It requires very little looking after and its light weight makes it easy to transport," says sociologist Alberto Rivera. "It is also the only crop with a guaranteed market." Mr. Rivera follows the coca economy on behalf of CERES, a Cochabamba-based social research organization.

Crucial to the programme's success, therefore, is the price of coca. For crop alternatives to be attractive, coca needs to remain as cheap as it is today. As a result of over-production and an intensified crackdown on drug trafficking in Colombia in the mid-1980s, prices of coca—and the number of buyers of coca paste—have declined sharply. After peaking at $15 per kilogramme in 1983, prices of the raw leaf tumbled to a low of 30 US cents a kilogramme in late 1989. Prices in 1990 settled at around $1.00 a kilo. This still gives an average Bolivian coca grower an annual income of $2,000.

In Bolivia, the poorest country in South America, $2,000 is more than three times what most teachers earn. "Coca was like a chicken that laid golden eggs," says Gabriel Ibáñez, a farmer who lives in an illegal coca-growing district of the Yungas region. "In eradicating my two hectares I killed the mother hen."

Mr. Ibáñez gave up coca in return for a package of alternatives whose full monetary value will only be known years from now. He receives training from one of eight farming centres set up by UNFDAC and grows sugar cane in a plot that he shares with other farmers. He takes a cut of profits according to the number of days he works. At home, he has planted a high-yielding coffee variety which will take three years to mature. He also bought beehives and a pregnant sow on credit. He hopes to repay the debt soon by selling his pigs and honey.

With coca prices at current levels, UNFDAC expects the value of the options it is offering to eventually double farmers' incomes. In the Yungas region in the northwest, more than 4,000 families have already raised their income by one-third over former earnings from coca.

Aside from the long-term monetary advantages, there are other immediate benefits. Free fish fingerlings are distributed to farmers to raise in ponds, and government funds, combined with local labour, have produced hundreds of kilometres of roads, new water systems and bridges, schools and hospitals.

Such actions have prompted more than 12,000 Bolivians to join the programme. By providing beehives and pregnant sows, which produce within months, farmers are assured of some market income while awaiting the pay off from slower maturing varieties of coffee, rubber trees, papaya and high value crops like macadamia nuts and passion fruit.

In the mountainous Yungas region, farmers for centuries have grown coffee alongside the traditional coca they raised for the country's leaf chewers, who currently number 1.5 million. As a reliable source of foreign exchange, coffee has been singled out as the most promising alternative crop. To date, farmers have planted more than 2,300 hectares of new coffee varieties, which should triple traditional yields. Farmers

Raising piglets can produce quick income to replace profits from coca.

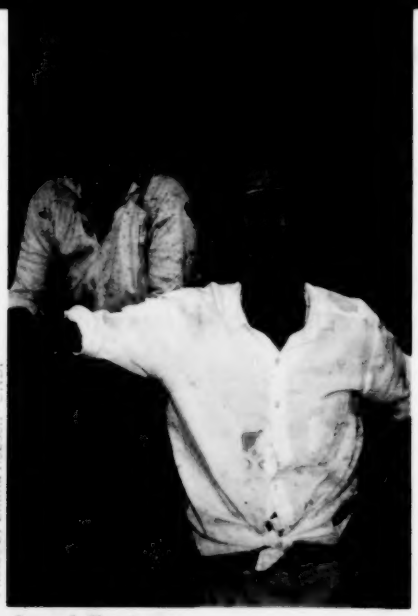


Photo by Emma Robson, UNDP

Angel Jiménez and his wife have stopped growing coca to raise corn, pigs and bees.

Source: *US Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, 1985*

■ **Coca Producing Areas**

hope also to get higher prices for their coffee by forming trade associations through which they can deal with export markets directly.

Unlike in the Yungas area, there is no one obvious crop substitute for farmers in the tropical forests of the Chapare district. Most of the region's 35,000 families migrated there during the cocaine boom of the early 1980s. Drought, hyper-inflation and the collapse of the price of tin, Bolivia's main export, drew them from the depressed highlands in search of survival.

The region has tea, rubber, yucca and other indigenous crops, none of which provide the profits coca does. It would still take twice as much coffee and eighteen times as many bananas to equal the value of the same weight of coca. In season, oranges fetch only 60 US cents per 100. "When you consider transportation costs," says citrus producer Angel Jiménez, "it's enough to make a farmer give up."

But through better farming techniques, food processing and the construction of roads to get products to market, UNFDAC is helping maximize the value of the Chapare region's existing crops. According to UNFDAC consultant Adelino Pagnossin, one farmer tending two hectares of rubber could make up to $8,000 a year, four times the average earnings from coca. A milk processing plant built by UNFDAC with Swedish aid should boost the income of the region's 9,000 dairy farmers by turning their low-value milk into butter and cheeses. To cash in on the region's glut of oranges, a juice processing plant is being built.

UNFDAC expects that within 10 years, the more than 20 per cent of Bolivia's coca farmers assisted under the programme will be enjoying earnings and living standards that make them immune to the temptation of returning to coca.

But reduction efforts in neighbouring Peru, the largest producer of coca, are facing resistance from two terrorist groups. And in all the major producing countries in Latin America—Bolivia, Colombia and Peru—new plots are being clandestinely planted. "Overall, production of coca is increasing," says Michael Ayala, the UNFDAC programme officer in charge of Latin America. "Given our budget limitations, we cannot hope to eliminate farmers' dependence on coca in the whole of the Andean area."

The Andean countries accounted for one-third of UNFDAC's $64 million budget for 1990. "Our aim is to show that in any given area you can reduce production, and with the full co-operation of the peasants," says Mr. Ayala. "That much we have achieved."

The Bolivian government is now negotiating to win the full co-operation of the peasant federation in the "red zone," the major remaining pocket of resistance. If these coca-producers agree to rip out their plantations, Bolivia could be on target for attaining full eradication of illegally grown coca.

One snag is that the permanent presence of government in the region would likely chase the factories producing semi-refined and refined cocaine into sparsely populated neighbouring districts in Bolivia. Moreover, throngs of poor farmers may go with them if the interdiction efforts falter and Bolivia does not receive more development aid.

While there is no quick and easy way of eliminating the source of the world's cocaine and crack, the approaches pioneered by UNFDAC in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru appear to offer the best prospects. Indeed, the one-year-old government of Peru, whose previous interdiction tactics have exacerbated rural violence and made it difficult to reach farmers, recently announced it was seeking foreign aid to provide a much enlarged alternative development programme for its own coca farmers. ■

RECONSTRUCTION

Letter from Kabul

By Ross Mountain

Kabul, Afghanistan—Events in Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, and the Middle East pushed Afghanistan off the front pages during this past year. But the intractable civil war here goes on. The year 1990 was full of mixed signals, with threats of major offensives on the capital punctuated with rising expectations for peace each time senior US and Soviet officials met. Hope is still focused on the long-awaited joint statement calling for the mutual suspension of arms supplies and peace-making efforts of the UN Secretary-General. When and if a negotiated settlement is reached, it could lead to UN-supervised elections.

After 12 years of devastating conflict that has left more than one million Afghans dead and driven seven million from their homes, there is a widespread longing for peace. Yet as vital as superpower agreement will be, it will not necessarily mean the end of the war. This must be worked out between the different parties involved—the government in Kabul, the seven Mujahidin parties based in Pakistan, the eight in Iran, and increasingly, opposition commanders inside the country. This will be complex as rival opposition groups are prone to armed conflict between themselves as well as with the government.

Ross Mountain, a New Zealander, has been UNDP's acting resident representative in Kabul for the past two and a half years.

This being Afghanistan, however, all may not be as it seems. Local truces have been worked out and substantial areas have been free from fighting for a year or more. But assisting fair elections that would follow the peace will be far more complicated than the UN monitoring operations in Namibia and Nicaragua.

The political equation in Kabul took an unexpected turn last March when the then Afghan Minister of Defense launched an abortive coup. At lunch time on March 6, 1990 low-flying MIGs passed over our office and deposited their load over our back wall into the compound of the Presidential Palace.

While moving the UN community to safety amidst the bombing had its share of challenges, the event had its lighter moments. After a few sorties, anti-aircraft guns were mounted by government loyalists. Each time a plane appeared—no matter how far away—everybody in possession of a weapon opened up with abandon. This included the guards at our gate with their Kalashnikovs, the tank at the end of the street, and other soldiers scrambling with rocket-propelled grenades. Stray grenades accounted for several of the 'bomb craters' in nearby UN compounds.

Despite some damage to UN premises, all UN staff, as well as the rest of the international community, came through unscathed. The coup attempt was rapidly put down.

After being immersed in security concerns for a long time, we have finally managed to start getting the UN—and in particular the UNDP—programme more properly under way on a country-wide basis. The willingness of the government to regard UN operations as politically neutral and for the benefit of Afghans throughout the country is unique, allowing the UN to support activities in opposition areas outside government control.

In 1989, UN projects were launched outside Kabul for the first time in 11

UNDP

The outskirts of Kabul in winter.

AFGHANISTAN

years in both northern cities and cross-border from Pakistan and Iran into Mujahidin controlled areas in the east and south. Last year, UN activities were initiated "cross-line" from the government cities of Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat and Faizabad and cross-border from the Soviet Union directly into areas controlled by the Mujahidin.

The seven UN international staff present when the Soviet troops withdrew in February 1989 grew to 35 by the end of that year, and now our numbers have reached a total of 110 expatriate personnel, with authority for further expansion.

Utilizing common standards and often the same UN technical expertise in both government and opposition areas, UNDP's approach aims at the eventual merger of activities as soon as a nation- wide administration can be established. In this way we are, for example, seeking to develop a country-wide agricultural extension service for farmers. We are also broadening our collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), based in Pakistan which are implementing most UN projects in the east and south of the country.

Programmes to help prepare for peace are being launched in agriculture and rural development, plus housing, water supply and sanitation, health, communications, vocational training, trade promotion, assistance to the disabled and education. Such efforts include urgent steps to beat back a plague of locusts and other pests in the most productive farming areas of 10 northern provinces. We are developing a country-wide framework for rehabilitation activities so that as soon as the shooting dies down the government-of-the-day will be in a position to decide how best to reallocate some of the more than 60 per cent of its budget currently spent on the military. The planning we are doing now will also help external donors currently absent from Afghanistan to select priority areas for support.

Staff security has remained a major preoccupation as UN operations expand in both scope and complexity.

UNDP's Ross Mountain (*left*) and Pavel Kral (*centre*) meet with an Afghan NGO in Asadabad.

UNDP

A UN jeep rushes medicines to earthquake victims on the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Pavel Kral / UNDP

The cross-line and cross-border missions typically need prior clearance from sometimes a dozen or more commanders that control the areas through which such missions must pass. It is a process that requires the prior exchange of letters and the imbibing of many cups of tea with each group in order to negotiate passage. Given the number of such missions that have now taken place, the incidence of "prolonged teas"—as we term unscheduled delays when colleagues are detained—has been remarkably low.

Afghans have a well developed entrepreneurial tradition and the private sector, against all odds, has survived often hostile policies of various governments over the last decade. Indeed, traders have flourished. The government has now opted to increase involvement by both foreign and domestic investors to the maximum—with some success despite less than ideal conditions for making capital risks.

In Kabul we were receiving around 140 rockets a week in May and June. With the arrival of winter the number dropped to around 20. Casualties inside the city have also decreased. Again the UN community has been very lucky—only one staff member sustained a superficial wound caused by a cluster-bomb rocket. Such rockets have on occasion hit in international residential areas and in the vicinity of the UN offices but have usually only caused physical damage. Others have fallen elsewhere in the city with substantial casualties. The array of outgoing weapons clearly also adds to the rising toll of those killed or maimed by the war.

An irrigation repair project in the Pech Valley.

Photos by Pavel Kral / UNDP

Children of displaced persons in Mazar-i-Sharif have overwhelmed existing schools.

A UN-funded de-mining team in the Kunar Valley.

Yet life and work does go on. Kabul is a large sprawling city and most rockets fall out of ear shot. A wide range of security precautions are taken and UN staff generally come to accept them as an unpleasant fact of life—like traffic accidents and muggings elsewhere.

The initiation of a UN mine-clearing programme has allowed some of us to have a clearer view of man's inventiveness in designing means of killing their fellow human beings. Some three dozen types of mines, produced notably by the USSR, Pakistan, the US, Egypt and Italy, have found their way into the country. So far UN staff have been spared the consequences of tripping over one of the reportedly millions of mines that have been laid. One Afghan NGO de-miner on a UN-financed project was not so lucky and we were obliged to organize a maiden flight by the UN plane to Bamyan city—which is totally in Mujahidin hands—to bring out a young double amputee to be cared for in the International Red Cross hospital in Kabul.

The international community has grown in the past year with the further expansion of the large International Committee for the Red Cross delegation and the more than 20 diplomatic missions. The French and Italians reopened their embassies last year. However, for UN staff, Kabul is still a no-dependents duty station. There is a UN Staff House which, with the German Club, offers social and sporting facilities. Water, electricity, fuel and food supplies remain erratic. Yet there is an excellent spirit in the UN community, especially now that we have managed to expand our programmes. It is a thoroughly engrossing and challenging assignment for a UN staff member.

In Afghanistan, the UN system plays a role virtually unheard of elsewhere—with the possible exception of that experienced in Namibia during the transition to independence. If properly managed, the UN system has the opportunity to play a catalytic role in helping the people here rebuild their lives, their villages and the economic, social and administrative systems of the country as a whole—virtually from scratch. May we prove worthy of this challenge. ■

Firms in Kabul produce garments for export aided by Afghanistan's Industrial Development Bank.

A UN warehouse for seeds, fertilizer and other aid is going up in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Sid Kane / UNDP

Ruth Massey / UNDP

Ruth Massey / UNDP

The New Population Bomb

AGING

By Sid Kane

Valletta, Malta—On this breezy island of timeless stone statues and ancient monuments, where there is a hint of immortality in the air, a major demographic shift is underway. The country's birth rate has been dropping sharply, and the number of Maltese over 60 is expected to double by 2025. Such projections have caused health planners to search for ways to provide for a growing elderly population, many of whom will be unable to care for themselves. One response has been to launch a national home-care programme designed to help the aged remain in their communities.

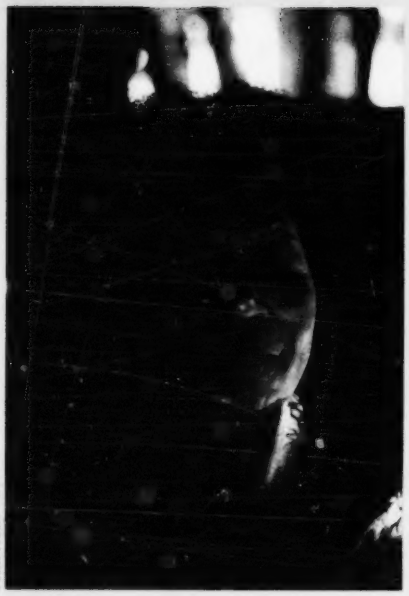
The Maltese are not alone in seeking local solutions to what is becoming a global problem. In India there will be more than 75 million people over 60 in the year 2000, up from 55 million today. A new law has made employed children responsible for the care of their parents.

In Botswana, where life expectancy has risen from 50 to 68 in the last 20 years, young people are being offered cash incentives to adopt an elderly person—to become, in effect, a surrogate family.

In Egypt, where the number of people over 60 is expected to triple between 1980 and 2020, youth centres are being converted into residences for the aged. And in Morocco, free work space and raw materials are being provided to retired artisans so that they can stay productive. Proceeds from the sale of the artisans' ceramics and rugs are reinvested in community groups of retired people.

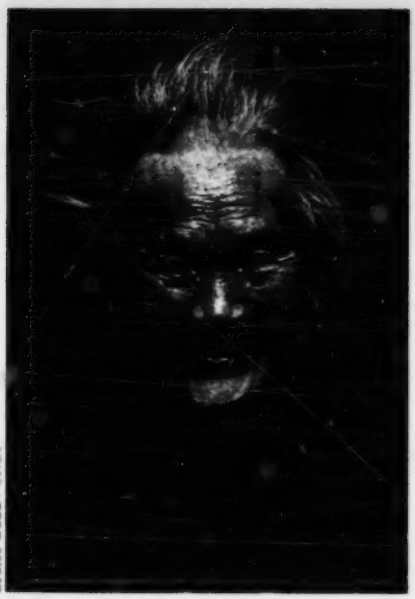
All of these countries are in a race against time. In the past, caring for the elderly was not a serious burden in most developing countries, because of relatively short life spans. But today, with life expectancy climbing in the developing world from 46 in 1960 to a projected 69 in 2025, and with the break-up of the extended family due to urbanization, aging threatens to become a major problem.

By the year 2025, according to a



John Isaac / UN

John Isaac / UN



Louise Gubb / UNDP

A Maltese institute is the first to deal with the explosive growth of the elderly in developing nations

United Nations study, there will be 1.1 billion people over the age of 60 living in the world—up 300 per cent from 1980. An alarming 72 per cent of these people will live in developing countries. Over the same period, birth rates in the developing world are expected to drop by 40 per cent, meaning that there will be far less children growing up to care for their aging parents.

What is emerging, medical experts say, is a new global development challenge that few predicted and even fewer are prepared for. Most developing countries lack the funds and the expertise to provide for the massive increase of older people, which has been spurred by improved health care and nutrition, the control of such infectious diseases as tuberculosis and diphtheria, and by better sanitary and social conditions.

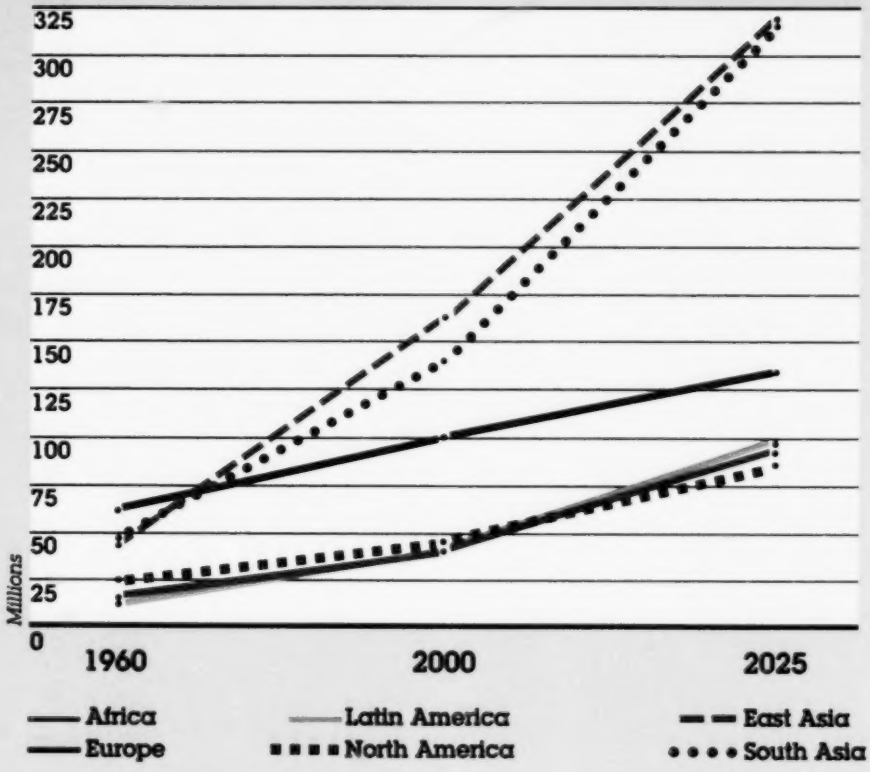
"Developing countries are just starting to realize that they desperately need a coherent strategy to guarantee health care and income security for their growing elderly populations," says Dr. Mario Garrett, a gerontology expert with the International Institute on Aging in Valletta. The Institute was founded by the Maltese government two years ago with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

There is no small irony in the fact that long-sought-after improvements in health and social conditions have yielded yet another set of challenges stemming from greater life expectancy. Unlike richer nations, developing countries cannot afford the costly options of large nursing homes or specialized medical institutions for the aged. Instead, they must find more practical, low-cost solutions. For the old living in the world's poorer countries, the simple tasks of collecting firewood, fetching water and walking long distances to markets grow more arduous each day.

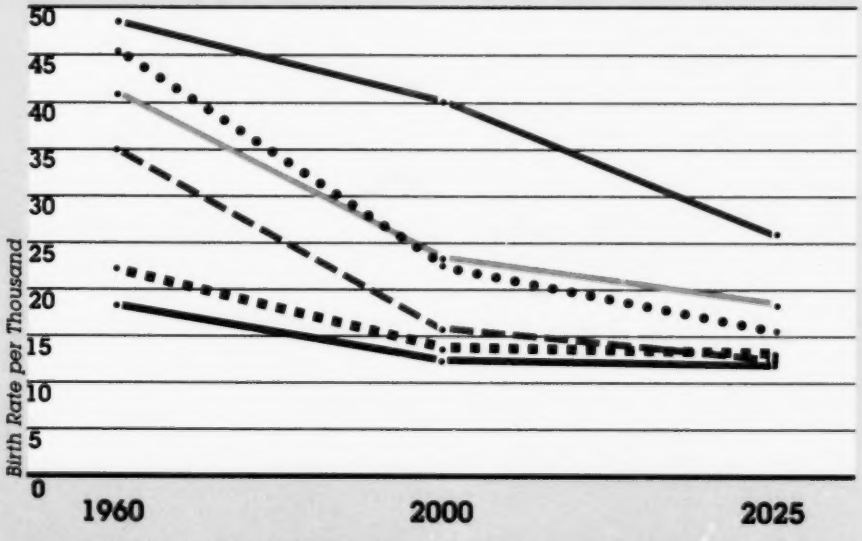
Regionally, Africa is expected to experience the greatest increase in the ranks of its elderly, as the number of people over 60 is expected to soar from 23 million to 100 million between 1980 and 2025. In Latin America, an increase from 23 million to 93 million is predicted during those years, while the Asia and Pacific region will watch those over 60 more than triple, from

MALTA

Estimated and Projected Number of Persons Aged 60 and Over



Estimated and Projected Birth Rates in Some World Regions



Source: *World Population Prospects: Estimates and Projections as Assessed in 1982* (United Nations)

170 million to 623 million.

"Developing countries in these regions," says Dr. Julian Mamo, an epidemiologist with the Institute, "are completely lacking in specialized medical training for the aged, many of whom suffer from ailments common to old age. And less than 20 per cent of the elderly in most developing countries receive any form of income security."

The steady exodus of young people from rural areas to the cities, resulting in the break-up of families and farm communities, has added to the problem of caring for the elderly. In traditional agrarian societies, experts say, older people could always count on family members for food and shelter. Now, with the rise of urbanization in Africa, Asia and Latin America, more of the aged are being forced to fend for themselves. "It's an unfortunate truth that the elderly are casualties of civilization," says Dr. Alfred Grech, the Institute's director. "Family support grows weaker the more modern and urban societies become. The old are frequently left out, and have the most to lose."

The UN-sponsored Institute was created specifically to act as a bridge between developed and developing countries on matters pertaining to the aged. It offers training courses in medical geriatrics for health workers, in income security strategies for policy makers and in social gerontology, which examines a broad spectrum of issues that affect the elderly.

It seems fitting that the Institute, the first of its kind to benefit the world's poorer nations, is housed in a refurbished building on a narrow cobblestone street in the historic old city of Valletta. In its first four workshops it has already trained over 100 participants, whose expenses were paid by fellowships from UNDP and other donors. Additionally, 15 candidates each year receive scholarships to attend a one-year postgraduate programme in gerontology at the University of Malta. UNDP's US$300,000 contribution is ad-

Dr. Alfred Grech, (*seated*) director of the International Institute on Aging.

Photos by Sid Kane / UNDP

Seven per cent of all Maltese over 65 now reside in hospitals for the elderly.

ministered by the government. Assistance is also provided by the UN Department of Technical Co-operation for Development.

Aside from its training activities, the Institute has established a computerized data bank of research organizations to enhance technical co-operation in the field, and is building a library of journals, reports, demographic studies and audio-visual materials.

It is no coincidence that the tiny island of Malta, located just south of Sicily, has become an international learning centre for developing countries that are watching their elderly multiply. In some Maltese communities, the aged already make up a full 20 per cent of the inhabitants, many of whom have witnessed firsthand the consequences of urbanization. Only decades ago Malta was almost entirely made up of small, rustic farm communities. Today, it is overwhelmingly urban.

"In the rural areas, the elderly used to play an important role because of their experience and wisdom," says John Rizzo Naudi, Malta's parliamentary secretary for the care of the elderly. "But with the break-up of communities and families, the old often lose not only their homes, but their status as well. It was once considered taboo to commit an older person to a care facility here, but not anymore."

Seven per cent of all Maltese over 65 now reside in hospitals for the elderly. The figure disturbs health practitioners here, who say it is high when compared to other countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, only 4.5 per cent of people in this age group live in such institutions.

To its credit, the government has built modern, low-cost care centres for the old who need them. It has trained doctors in geriatric medicine and sees to it that all retired people receive some form of income security. And Parliament has funded a nation-wide home-care programme designed to help the aged and frail stay in their home towns or urban neighbourhoods—and remain productive.

"Seniority should keep its status," Mr. Naudi says. "People should not be written off late in life, when, because of their experience, they can often contribute the most to society." Some North African countries have already put this view into practice. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, elderly people are being recruited to help plan and carry out rural development programmes.

While a step in the right direction, such initiatives are dwarfed by the immensity of the care challenge that is now emerging. "Our centre is being flooded with requests for help from developing countries," Dr. Grech said, "indicating the great need for training and assistance in this area. We are ready and well-positioned to help, but face a funding challenge of our own."

Without additional financial assistance from donor countries, the Institute might be unable to continue, much less expand its activities beyond training 115 specialists a year—a fraction of the need for gerontologists in the developing world. ■

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